

Editorial

School board ought to join freeway foes

At the urging of member Rae Waters, the Kyrene School Board recently took a tentative step forward to join the growing number of people, organizations and governments fighting against the proposed plan to turn Pecos Road into the future Loop 202 South Mountain Freeway.

But as calmly as the board stepped into the fray, it just as calmly stepped out of it.

The board moved wisely both times, stepping backward so time could be had to gain legal advice on their actions, and stepping forward to protect young students, whose playgrounds and campuses would be subjected to exhaust fumes from the freeway traffic.

Expectations are that the board will revisit Waters' motion and approve it. Board members would be wise to do so.

As staff writer Jason Ludwig reported last week, Waters introduced a motion at the Jan. 17 school board meeting asking the governing board to call for all parties involved in the freeway's planning to find an alternate route that would meet the needs of the residents while avoiding harmful effects on students in the school district.

It seems that turning Pecos Road into a 10-lane freeway would affect seven existing schools, including five in the Kyrene district. The three that would be closest to the freeway would be Lagos Elementary at a distance of about 20 feet; Akimel A-al Middle School at about 200 feet, and Estrella Elementary at about 350 feet. Farther away would be Sierra Elementary, at about 800 feet, and Milenio at about 1,600 feet. Desert Vista High School and Kyrene Montessori sit about 800 feet away from the proposed freeway.

Granted, there are plenty of schools built near freeways, and children play in those schoolyards day after day as the debate continues on how harmful exhaust fumes are for children. However, despite the pros and cons each side in the debate offer, it's difficult to believe the fumes don't pose some hazard when schools offer to keep children indoors during high-pollution days if parents wish.

The greatest benefit Kyrene can offer to the fight against the freeway along Pecos Road is adding its voice to the growing number of opponents who are presenting reasonable objections as to why this highway ought not to be built.

Public opinion is a consideration in the final decision on whether the South Mountain Freeway gets built. The more voices representing large numbers of people the stronger becomes the potential to erase this freeway plan, or put it on hold until a more suitable route can be found.

If the Kyrene School Board goes forward with its opposition to the freeway on Pecos Road, it would join a chorus of wise voices.

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